

Gallant Wycombe so nearly there

By ROBERT OXBY

Wycombe Wanderers ... 0 Middlesbrough ... 0

THEY clung to gasometers perched dizzily on the roofs of the multi-storey car park and the general hospital, and crammed sloping Loakes Park in the hope of seeing a miracle — and they saw one.

The miracle was that Middlesbrough survived to face a replay against the Rothmans Isthmian League side at Ayresome Park tomorrow. "I thought we'd had it," confessed their manager, Jack Charlton.

Frankly, the First Division side were awful: a shambling, nerve-racked parody of themselves, brainwashed by fears of the notorious slope which, other professionals have assured me, is less intimidating than it appears.

Without the lowering defiance of Maddren and Boam, Middlesbrough would have faced the humiliation of all time. Elsewhere, Souness was their one player of genuine artistry but he, too, lost his composure well before the end.

Wanderers blossom

Wanderers blossomed like men who have felt an expected Colosseum of martyrdom turning slowly into a stage on which to exhibit their talents. At the start, they impeded each other like frightened schoolboys, but that did not last long.

Soon Phillips, Mead and Reardon were winning the ball at the back, Searle was thrusting down the middle and Horseman, 34, and the tall Perrin were stretching Middlesbrough on the flanks.

Birdseye went just wide with a fierce drive, Platt pushed out a swinging corner by Perrin, and Boam blocked a shot from Reardon. Meanwhile, Foggon, later to be replaced, was the only visitor to trouble Maskell.

Although Perrin missed agonisingly from Kennedy's corner, there was only one team in it from then on. Borough's 4-4-2 became 5-4-1, then 5-5-0 as Wanderers battled vainly for the historic goal that would have brought justice to the result.

Wycombe.—Maskell; Birdseye, Hand, Mead, Phillips, Reardon, Perrin, Kennedy, Searle, Hollifield, Horseman (sub: Evans, 89min).

Middlesbrough.—Platt; Craggs, Spraggon, Souness, Boam, Maddren, Brine, Hickton, Mills, Foggon (sub: Willey, 80mins), Armstrong.